



# Priorities of the Construction of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the Conditions of Development of Forms and Methods of Contemporary Armed Struggle

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**A**t the end of 2016, Shavkat M. Mirziyoyev was elected president of the Republic of Uzbekistan by the overwhelming majority of the voters. From his first days in office, President Mirziyoyev began to implement profound reforms in all areas of state development, including in the armed forces. The Republic of Uzbekistan had not upgraded and updated the legal framework for the functioning of its armed forces since 2000. Therefore, one of the first priorities for improving the national army was to update the defense doctrine of the Republic of Uzbekistan. This article discusses the current doctrinal revisions and other new priorities identified by the leadership of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the further development of the armed forces.

Within the spectrum of measures vital to the preparation for national defense, the development of the military and the overall organization of the armed forces occupy the most important place. Military development is an integral part of overall state development and constitutes the practical implementation of the state's military policy. This policy is a crucial subordinate element in the tasks necessary to ensure the security of the country, strengthening its defenses, and preventing aggression.

As the enlargement of the spatial scope, the intensity, and destructive consequences of wars have progressed, the quantity of forces, means, and material assets applied to them have also increased. Also, the continuous military development required as an integral part of the advance preparation by the state to repel aggression has become more complex. In modern conditions, the defense establishment has become a complex system of various interrelated activities, the employment and integration of which require enormous financial and material costs involving almost all state and economic structures, the private sector of the economy, and indeed the entire population of the country.

**Previous page:** Uzbekistan soldiers pass in review 13 September 2000 during the Central Asian Peacekeeping Battalion (CENTRASBAT) 2000 opening ceremonies in Kazakhstan. CENTRASBAT 2000 was a multinational peacekeeping and humanitarian relief exercise sponsored by U.S. Central Command. Exercise participants included approximately three hundred U.S. troops along with soldiers from Uzbekistan, Kyrgystan, United Kingdom, Turkey, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Mongolia. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jim Varhegyi, U.S. Air Force)

The construction of the armed forces is ongoing constantly, intensifying during periods of increased risk to national security, especially with the emergence of a military threat, and, of course, continuing during war. The urgency of this problem for Uzbekistan is due to the fact that at the present time the armed forces of the majority of the states of the world, including the leading powers, are taking measures to fundamentally transform the organizational structure of their armed forces, modernize their technological bases and equipment, and elevate their combat capabilities.

A deep understanding of modern views, trends, and decisions in the field of military development and construction of armed forces is an indispensable condition for successful operations by Uzbek commanders in the field. In the context of continuing globalization and the transformation of the entire system of international relations, the military and political situation in the world is increasingly characterized by an expansion of the spectrum of challenges and threats to international and regional security: the intensification of the geopolitical tensions, and the growing predominance of coercive approaches to resolving conflicts and crisis situations. This has led internationally to lowering the threshold for the use of force, including employment of weapons of mass destruction, militarized solutions of disputes, the spread of international terrorism and extremism, and the rise of information and cyberattacks against states.

With increasing frequency, generally recognized principles and norms of international law are subjected to free interpretation and selective application.<sup>1</sup> Analysis of modern military conflicts testifies to the pattern of the unraveling of traditional norms associated with the initiation and conduct of wars. Interstate conflicts have arisen in circumstances in which countries have been attacked by significantly more economically advanced states that chose to exercise their military strength within their zones of national or security interests.

And, although all modern armed conflicts differ from each other in terms of their individual context and the composition of the participating states and duration of combat, at the same time these conflicts share common features that exhibit discernible regularities or patterns. To meet the challenges of the modern threat environment, Uzbekistan has undertaken a wide variety of initiatives aimed at upgrading and updating its armed forces.



## Uzbek Defense Doctrine Frames the Military and Sociopolitical Challenges

The defense doctrine of the Republic of Uzbekistan, approved in law by the Republic of Uzbekistan on 9 January 2018, describes the main characteristics of modern military conflicts:

- preparatory informational and psychological propaganda campaigns aimed at establishing political justification for engaging in conflict and shaping international public opinion on the need to use military force to resolve an outstanding dispute;
- active use, along with military force, of nonmilitary measures (political, economic, information-psychological, and others);
- the use of high-precision weapons, electronic warfare means, unmanned aerial vehicles and robotic systems, network automated control systems; the ability to pinpoint targets on the entire territory of the opposing side; high mobility and employment of self-sufficient groupings of forces;
- active participation of special operations forces, illegal armed formations, private military

companies, and other hired personnel using sabotage and terrorist methods of fighting; broad involvement and high vulnerability of the local population; and

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Shavkat M. Mirziyoyev inspects a military unit in the South-West Special District 20 January 2018 during a visit to the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan. (Photo courtesy of the Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan)

- deliberate disabling (disruption of functioning) of important state infrastructure, the destruction of which can trigger large-scale emergency situations, including transborder crises; and a high probability of the rapid transformation of one form of military conflict into another.<sup>2</sup>

To effectively deal with emerging threats, the construction of the armed forces should be carried out taking into account the characteristics and structure of society as well as the political, economic, scientific and technical, and military capabilities of the country.



In addition, it must consider the main characteristics of modern military conflicts.

Like any complex, multifaceted process that encompasses almost all aspects of public life, the construction of the armed forces is connected to the solution of a multitude of problems arising from the day-to-day activities of state and higher levels of military command. In accordance with these scientific assumptions, the construction of the armed forces is a process of implementing interrelated activities for their creation, continuous development, and training to fulfill the assigned tasks.

### **Uzbek Initiatives Aimed at Dealing with Potential Threats**

The Republic of Uzbekistan during 2017–2018 managed to achieve a concrete overhaul of its strategic approach for the renewal of the country's armed forces. First, the qualitatively updated defense doctrine of Uzbekistan prioritized protecting the sovereignty and independence of the Motherland based on the principle of a flexible and open foreign policy, with particular emphasis on the development of friendly and

An Uzbek team member participates in the Scout Trail obstacle course 3 August 2017 at the Novosibirsk Higher Military Command School in the Novosibirsk region of Russia. The course was part of the Army Scout Masters competition, held during Russia's annual International Army Games. (Photo by Rostislav Netisov, Sputnik via Associated Press)

constructive relations with our neighbors. For the first time, the full content of our doctrine has been openly published so as to ensure the transparency of the defense policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The doctrine defines the principal approaches of Uzbekistan's defense policy, as well as the tasks and criteria for the use of the armed forces. It further outlines promising directions for the further construction and development of the national military establishment.

On 14 January 2017, Mirziyoyev extended enthusiastic congratulations to the defenders of the Motherland on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the formation of the armed forces. In the process, he noted that he placed a high priority on the improvement of the official regulations in the national security sphere for the purpose of strengthening the nation's army:

Most of the [existing] documents in this area do not meet the realities of today. We objectively need to build a clear state system of strategic planning for ensuring national security. Central to this purpose should be regular updating as necessary of the National Security Concept, which should establish the principle of flexibility and openness of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, and prioritize developing constructive relations with our closest neighbors. At the same time, a firm commitment is needed to preserve the sovereignty and independence of the country, and the cultural and civilizational identity of our people.<sup>3</sup>

Second, taking into account the provisions of the defense doctrine and the geostrategic location of our country, the structures and tasks of the military districts have been radically revised. In particular, the structure of all units and commands of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Uzbekistan have been completely revised and updated.<sup>4</sup> This work directly followed the president's pronouncement in early 2017 on the organizational development of the armed forces. In particular, he noted,

It is necessary to clarify the structure and tasks of each military district, paying special attention to its purpose, the specifics of the use of troops, as well as the specifics of operational areas. Considerable attention and concentration of resources also requires the task of strengthening the potential of our "air shield"—the Air Defense Forces and the Air Force. It is necessary in a short time to improve their organizational structure and management system, as well as to implement a series of measures to equip them with the latest technology and weapons.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequently, the military has carried out a complex series of organizational measures, which facilitated the revision of regulations and organizational structures that had formerly impeded units from fully engaging in combat training. These measures should enable the military to strengthen the professional skills of our personnel and increase readiness to fulfill the tasks required for the defense of the country. In this context, the president paid special attention to the physical and psychological resilience of those in military service.

As the recent armed conflicts in different regions of the world have demonstrated, the most serious losses resulting from hostilities among personnel are frequently associated with severe psychological stress and pressure, the consequences of which cannot be easily overcome even in peacetime. As he specified,

Heads of defense-related ministries and departments should develop fundamentally new guidelines for the organization of physical and psychological training of servicemen of all categories, with special emphasis on their applications for those experiencing combat. Servicemen should have strong health, be tough, and be able to withstand arduous physical and psychological stress.<sup>6</sup>

Third, the first important step in the formation of the national defense-industrial complex was the formation of the State Committee for the Defense Industry, which united all the country's key enterprises.<sup>7</sup> The formation of a full-fledged defense sector of the economy in the short term will allow Uzbekistan not only to provide the national army with modern weapons and equipment but also to create additional jobs and contribute to the diversification of the country's economy.

At the beginning of last year, the president, in his directions to the armed forces, stressed,

Unfortunately, this challenge is not being addressed at the pace at which we should expect. In this regard, as a priority, we must implement the Comprehensive Program for 2017–2021, which provides specific provisions and targeted financing for the purchase of new military products,

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in addition to repair and modernization of existing equipment.<sup>8</sup>

In this context, he noted that in the long term, along with increasing the efficiency of the repair enterprises of the Ministry of Defense, as well as the Chirchik Aviation Repair Plant and the state enterprise of the Vostok NGO, we should concentrate on creating a scientific and production base, service centers, and joint ventures. Furthermore, he directed the planning of localization of production of certain types of military products at the country's leading enterprises.

In reality, the Republic of Uzbekistan has great potential and great opportunities for developing a defense-industrial complex. In particular, district administrative heads have the opportunity to organize in the regions production of uniforms and other specialized clothing, not to mention military goods such as various tools or dry rations. Additionally, other enterprises may be established for the production of dual-use products. In early 2018, in connection with the implementation of these opportunities, the president issued a decree conferring on provincial leaders the corresponding additional powers required to fulfill this objective.

Fourth, work on revitalizing and enhancing the role of local government bodies in strengthening the country's defense capability was introduced on an unprecedented scale. On the basis of the principle, "The National Army is our pride and honor," military administrative sectors have been created in the regions for carrying out a unified state policy in the field of defense education, ensuring the unity of the army and the people.<sup>9</sup> The creation in December 2017 of military-administrative sectors in each region of the country, as well as in the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the city of Tashkent, has as its primary task the inculcation of military-patriotic spirit in our youth, as well as among the population of the country as a whole. The presence of high morale, devotion to duty, love for the Motherland, and responsibility for its fate constitute a vital moral component of defense that directly affects military capability, the security of the country, and that of its citizens.

This important, complex task was set forth by the president in January 2017:

Patriotism is the moral basis of the viability of any state and acts as an important mobilizing resource for the all-round development

of society. That is why we must take concrete steps to create lasting immunity of our citizens against the negative impact of ideas alien to our traditions and to strengthen the sense of responsibility for the fate of the Fatherland. A reliable support in this difficult work can be the young people who have gone through the army school of courage, perseverance and faithful service to the Motherland. In this regard, the management and defense departments should maintain continuous communication with them. It is important to expand the powers of these structures in this work and cooperate with local authorities.<sup>10</sup>

In this context, it should be noted that under the personal direction of the president there is improvement in the system of training professional military personnel at all levels. The first step in 2017 was the creation of a completely new academy of the armed forces which, incorporating the glorious military traditions of the Tashkent Higher Combined Arms Command School and the accumulated experience of the existing academy, as well as leading scientific and educational institutions of the country, has truly assumed the central position in Uzbekistan's unified system of military education. And now, the academy is making maximum efforts to become a leading center of contemporary military science.

The deep, and it should be noted, personal study by the president of the problems of the military training system revealed many years of problems, the elimination of which necessitated a series of coordinated efforts. Among these is the creation of a system of generational transition and programmatic mentoring in order to create not only the latest classrooms and facilities in the armed forces academy and other educational institutions but also to provide the cadets and officer-students with the most advanced, innovative knowledge and skills.

One particularly important means is through the preparation of instructors both abroad and in higher military educational institutions within the Republic of Uzbekistan. "Preparing our military personnel on a professional basis on the best means of supplying the army with modern weapons and equipment is one of the key tasks," the president noted.<sup>11</sup>

Fifth, the effectiveness of social protection measures for servicemen, members of their families, and veterans



has increased. In 2017, twenty-eight residential buildings were commissioned in the regions of the country. Five hundred twenty-two servicemen were provided with modern, spacious, and bright apartments. In March-April 2018, another 720 families managed a new housewarming. This work will continue on an ongoing basis, with approximately 1,500 families of servicemen provided new housing each year.

The importance of this task, as well as the personal attention it has been accorded by the president, is evident in a statement from early 2018:

The construction of houses planned for 2018 should begin today, as this year one hundred multi-story houses are to be constructed across all regions for the benefit of military families. And I do not intend to listen to any excuses about this.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the strategic approach developed for the renewed armed forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan has a deliberate and planned character. Any trip of the president to the regions of the republic (carried out more than once a month) will include unscheduled

An Uzbek team participates in the final stage of the Safe Route competition 6 August 2017 at the firing range of the Tyumen Higher Military Engineering Command School in Tyumen, Russia. The competition was part of the 2017 International Army Games hosted annually by Russia's Defense Ministry. (Photo by Sergei Bobylev, TASS via Alamy Live News)

visits to military units and formations, and seek immediate resolution of problems.

It should be noted that the reform of the national army is envisaged in the elaborated Strategy for Development Activities of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017–2021.<sup>13</sup> In the near future, the president has prioritized tasks for the construction of the armed forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan as follows.

The first priority is the activation and enhancement of the role of civil society and state authorities on the ground, which will entail the active and personal participation of government leaders at all levels. They will be involved in a variety of matters, including the day-to-day operations of troops, improvement of the

infrastructure of military compounds, the development of military-patriotic education programs for youth, as well as cultivation of a deeper sense of pride, loyalty, and patriotism among servicemen who must be ready to defend the Motherland at any moment. Infrastructure improvements will embrace everything from new paved road networks and modern buildings to extension of fiber-optic cables to all military compounds and cutting-edge simulations and training packages. The head of the country paid special attention to strengthening work on perpetuating the memory of the heroes of modern history of Uzbekistan, including the provision of comprehensive care and support to their families and friends.

Second is an increase in the capabilities of the armed forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan in order to effectively fulfill the tasks before them. These include improving the units assigned to each military district, enhancing their combat readiness and effectiveness, and automating and optimizing the command and control systems necessary for the conduct of military operations.

Third is the need to review the regulatory framework for the planning and use of the armed forces in connection with the revision of conceptual documents to ensure

the security of the country and the improvement of organizational and staff structures.

Fourth is the requirement to further improve the system of combat and operational training of troops to raise and enhance the effectiveness and impact of exercises and training. As noted by the president,

They should be conducted with the maximum number of units and involve extensive coordination and cooperation. This will allow us to assess the capabilities of command and control networks, the actions of each serviceman—from the soldier to the commander—and the appropriateness and sufficiency of the tactics used to accomplish combat missions.<sup>14</sup>

Troops stand in formation during a visit by Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Shavkat M. Mirziyoyev 17 February 2018 in the Kogon district of Uzbekistan. Mirziyoyev was visiting to familiarize himself with the Uzbek soldiers and officers, and to observe their living conditions. (Photo courtesy of the Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan)





The fifth priority is maintaining a central focus on the systematic analysis of the real needs of troops, increasing their level of capability with the latest weaponry and other systems. In the words of the president, "In this regard, the Ministry of Defense, through the State Committee for Defense Industry, must fully implement during the period from 2018 to 2021 a comprehensive modernization program to provide troops with up-to-date weapons and other essential military equipment."<sup>15</sup>

Sixth is the further development of the social security system for servicemen. As Mirziyoyev observed, "From this point of view, it is urgent to adopt a set of measures to improve the system of social support and services within the armed forces through the year 2020."<sup>16</sup> Expanded privileges for long-serving volunteer personnel (*kontraktniki*) of all ranks will certainly elevate the prestige of the military and stimulate recruitment. And, elevated pay scales are just the beginning. Notable improvements include access to recreational and rehabilitation facilities. Further, discussions are currently underway to enable personnel to travel to neighboring central Asian states for vacations, something almost unthinkable previously. Lake Issyk-Kul in the Tian Shan Mountains of Kyrgyzstan has surfaced as a possible destination pending an official agreement. Credit privileges for automobile purchases and housing subsidies are also on the way. Perhaps most significant will be new educational opportunities such as the reservation of spaces in institutions of higher education across Uzbekistan for children of military families.

In light of these programmed improvements, I would like to note that according to the assessment conducted by Global Firepower, Uzbekistan in 2018 ranked thirty-ninth out of one hundred thirty-six countries considered on the list of the world's most capable armies with a Power Index rating 0.7185. Thus, according to the strength of the armed forces, the Republic of Uzbekistan became the most capable in Central Asia. Among the Commonwealth of Independent States countries, Uzbekistan ranks third, behind only Russia (second place overall) and Ukraine (twenty-ninth place overall). This rating is calculated on the basis of about fifty factors: the number of persons fit for military service, the size of the mobilizable reserve, the amount of state expenditures for the military, the capabilities of the specific arms and branches of the armed forces, and many other criteria.<sup>17</sup>

The specific features of a particular state tend to shape the characteristics of their armed forces. Not the least role in this is played by the geopolitical situation in the world and the region, as well as important trends in the development of the domestic policy of the state. Surveys indicate that ninety percent of the citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan currently support the efforts of their president. In addition, the active and sincere enthusiasm of all personnel of the armed forces to participate in the renewal of the national army gives reason to be confident of the quality and timely implementation of the goals outlined in this article. ■

## Notes

1. "About the Defensive Doctrine of the Republic of Uzbekistan," Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan ZRU-458, CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] Legislation, 9 January 2018, accessed 7 November 2018, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=102814> (license required).

2. Ibid.

3. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, "Festive Greeting of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the Defenders of Homeland," The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations, 17 January 2017, accessed 7 November 2018, <https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/fr/news/festive-greeting-president-republic-uzbekistan-defenders-homeland>.

4. "Speech of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev on January 10, 2018 at the meeting of the Security Council of the Republic of Uzbekistan in an expanded format," *Narodnoe Slovo* 6, 11 January 2018.

5. Mirziyoyev, "Festive Greeting"

6. "Speech of the President"

7. Ibid.

8. Mirziyoyev, "Festive Greeting"

9. "Speech of the President"

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11. "Speech of the President."

12. Ibid.

13. "Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2017-2021 Has Been Adopted Following Public Consultation," *Tashkent Times* (website), 8 February 2017, accessed 7 November 2018, [tashkenttimes.uz/national/541-uzbekistan-s-development-strategy-for-2017-2021-has-been-adopted-following](http://tashkenttimes.uz/national/541-uzbekistan-s-development-strategy-for-2017-2021-has-been-adopted-following).

14. "Speech of the President."

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. "Uzbekistan Military Strength," Global Firepower, accessed 6 December 2018, [https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=uzbekistan](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=uzbekistan).